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SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W AND AF/RSA AND INL AND L/LEI
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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT AND PM SAY GUINEA-BISSAU READY FOR

Classified By: Ambassador Marcia Bernicat for reasons 1.5 B and D.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Bernicat and AF/W Director Mary Beth Leonard accompanied by Political Counselor Mosby and OSC Chief Lt. Colonel Sousa met separately with Guinea-Bissau's newly elected President, Malam Bacai Sanha, and Prime Minister, Carlos Gomes, Jr., on September 9 after attending Sanha's inauguration the previous day. Despite being political adversaries (albeit members of the same party), both the head of state and head of government agreed that Guinea-Bissau now has conditions in place for positive change in general and security sector reform (SSR) in particular (a sentiment echoed by Acting Chief of Staff, Naval Captain Zamora Induta, in a separate meeting - to be reported septel). Both the president and prime minister asked when would the United States reopen its embassy in Guinea-Bissau, emphasizing the key role of the United States in the fight against narcotics trafficking and SSR. The prime minister requested that the USG use its influence to have former Naval Chief of Staff Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto moved from the Gambia, where he is currently under loose house arrest, to a non-neighboring country in West Africa, such as Nigeria, to prevent him from returning to Guinea-Bissau and destabilizing the country. The Ambassador also requested Guinea-Bissau's cooperation in investigations against Bubo and other suspected drug traffickers. END SUMMARY.

Inauguration Means Guinea-Bissau Ready for Change

¶2. (C) Prime Minister Gomes opined that the international community should now have more confidence in Guinea-Bissau following the inauguration of Sanha. He noted that Sanha is a member of PAIGC (the African Independence Party of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde), for which Gomes serves as president. As a result, he asserted that the political conditions for SSR and other reforms were now in place.

¶3. (C) Gomes also assured the Ambassador that his government had already initiated positive change in Guinea-Bissau by signing an agreement with International Monetary Fund (IMF) to obtain financing to pay internal debt. As a result the GOGB was able to pay nine months of public salaries (eight for this calendar year and one from last year). He said the IMF program, which requires that the GOGB comply with certain macro-economic criteria, demonstrated his government's seriousness. The prime minister also noted that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had provided assistance to pay for three months of salaries and that the country also received financial assistance from UEMOA and support for the armed forces from Libya. (see also reftel report on Qaddafi's visit last spring)

¶4. (C) Sanha and Gomes said the time was right to implement SSR in Guinea-Bissau. Sanha asserted that the key to SSR is the Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reinsertion (DDR) element. He reported that the Minister of Defense, Artur da Silva, had informed of plans to provide retired military personnel with 60-70 percent of their salaries. However, Sanha argued that this was unacceptable, claiming that the only way to ensure peace was to provide them with 100 percent of their salaries in retirement. When the Ambassador said doing so would be very expensive, the president replied, "That's the price we pay for peace." He went on to say that 60-70 percent could be acceptable if military personnel were given seed money to start some kind of revenue earning activity such as a business or farming. Sanha emphasized the importance of ensuring that retired soldiers not feel "abandoned." The Ambassador agreed, noting that plans to provide automatic payments from a fund kept outside of Guinea-Bissau could be viewed by pensioners as more desirable than a larger pension paid locally.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador assured the president and prime minister that the United States is working closely with other donors and noted that we have useful SSR experience from Liberia. Gomes stressed that the problem of SSR was not limited to money. Underlining the political delicacy of DDR, Sanha pointedly remarked that the majority of the members of the armed forces are former liberation fighters. He and Sanha both said SSR/DDR is key to achieving anything else in

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Guinea-Bissau. He said Guinea-Bissau is also in need of technical support, such as training for security personnel for the government. However, he stressed that Guinea-Bissau is sovereign and does not support the deployment of a stabilization force in country. Gomes said the quick impact projects discussed during the SSR conference in Cape Verde in April needed to be implemented soon and he called for the pension to be quickly established. To that end, he urged that the agenda of the donor round table being prepared for later this year in Abuja, Nigeria be transformed into one focused on SSR. Later, a follow-up economic and counter-narcotics focused donor round table should be held in a European capital.

Counter-Narcotics -----

¶6. (C) Both the president and prime minister pledged that Guinea-Bissau is committed to fight narcotics trafficking. While acknowledging there is still a problem, the president claimed that situation had improved since 2006/2007. (Comment: Observers believe traffickers have diverted many of their Guinea-Bissau operations over the last year due to the political unrest.) The prime minister assured the Ambassador that no one in his government is tied to drug trafficking. Gomes said he was working to ensure transparency in his government and pointed out that he had taken what he characterized as the unprecedented step for Africa of publicly declaring all of his assets before taking office. He informed the Ambassador that the GOGB planned to auction off the private jet which South American drug traffickers had been forced to leave in July 2008 Bissau due to mechanical failure. While the pilots were released by a corrupt judge in spite of an outstanding Interpol red notice and no drugs were recovered, the prime minister said he had instructed customs to seize the aircraft because the &medicine8 that the pilots claimed to have off-loaded was never inspected by GOGB authorities, and must be considered contraband. The Prime Minister said he would welcome assistance, both from DEA to vet potential buyers to ensure the plane is not recovered by traffickers, and to further strengthen GoGB asset forfeiture laws.

Keeping Admiral Bubo Away from Bissau

17. (C) Prime Minister Gomes solicited the assistance of the United States in ensuring that former Naval Chief of Staff Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto not return to Guinea-Bissau. According to Gomes, if Na Tchuto were to return to the country it would have a destabilizing effect, in terms of both political and criminal activity. Na Tchuto is currently under (apparently loose) house arrest in the Gambia. Gomes said he had discussed his desire for Na Tchuto, suspected of having attempted to initiate a coup d'etat in August 2008, with Gambian President Yahya Jammeh. Gomes asked that the United States use its influence to see that Na Tchuto be sent from the Gambia to a non-neighboring country elsewhere in West Africa, such as Nigeria, to reduce the likelihood of Na Tchuto returning to Guinea-Bissau. When asked why the GOGB could not simply ask the Gambia to arrest him and extradite him for his role in both narcotics trafficking and the failed coup plot, the prime minister said his country's judicial system is too weak. He pointed out that no one is ever successfully convicted in Guinea-Bissau for trafficking and that no one has ever been held accountable for assassinations. Gomes readily agreed to cooperate in investigating Bubo (and others) for alleged drug trafficking and agreed an arrest and conviction would send an important sign to traffickers.

Investigation in March Assassinations

18. (C) Prime Minister Gomes reiterated his government's condemnation of the March 1-2 assassinations of former President Joao Vieira and former Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Batiste Tagme Na Waie. He noted that he had sent a letter to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon requesting the creation of an international commission of inquiry. He reported that the secretary general had responded by pledging to provide support to the GOGB national commission of inquiry through the integrated and enhanced UN Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) in concert with ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the Community of Portuguese Speaking

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Countries (CPLP).

President Sanha Eager for U.S. Return and to Meet Obama

19. Both President Sanha and Prime Minister Gomes asked would the United States reopen its embassy in Bissau, emphasizing the importance such a signal would send to other donors and investors as well as malefactors in Guinea-Bissau and elsewhere. Sanha was particularly insistent, saying he wanted the embassy to reopen before the end of the year and that he wants to arrange to travel to the United States for a meeting with President Obama before the end of the year. However, asked if he planned to attend the upcoming UN General Assembly (which would provide an early opportunity to meet the President), Sanha said not this year. He said he preferred to wait until next year so that he could not simply talk about what he planned to do, but also what he will have accomplished in a year's time. The Ambassador assured both the head of state and the head of government that the Obama administration is committed to opening more diplomatic posts and the Department of State supports reopening. However, it will take some time to obtain the necessary funding. In the interim, the Ambassador will continue to encourage more and more USG officials to visit Bissau. Moreover, she hopes to have one embassy officer permanently based in Bissau in the coming year.

110. COMMENT: Both Sanha and Gomes emphasized the positive in their meeting with us (Sanha was almost giddy with optimism). Both political leaders emphasized that the moment to push for change on several fronts was now, and that quick, visible signs of support from the GoGB's friends were essential.

However, these two men who intensely dislike one another will have to put aside their differences and past grievances to take advantage of this potential new beginning following successful presidential elections. It is not clear that they will be able to do so. Acting Chief of Staff Induta is a close political ally of Gomes and while Sanha told us more than once in the run up to elections that he intends to keep Induta in place for the time being, many observers suspect that he will move to remove him at some point. This could provoke the fractured military to split further apart, perhaps even resulting in open conflict. It is also clear that Sanha does not have a clear or realistic understanding of what the donor market will bear regarding the pension fund for SSR/DDR. Finally, it is doubtful that members of Gomes' government are as free from drug-fueled corruption as he asserts. Nevertheless, we concur that prospects for positive change and SSR/DDR are the best they have been in years, and are working with donors to coordinate shorter and longer term efforts.

BERNICAT